Management practice and disability: an embodied perspective

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In organizational research, disability is most often treated as a hindrance for performance. One of the barriers to the employment of disabled people is the perceived extra costs related to adaptation of the physical work environment and reduced efficiency. This paper argues for a view on disability as a *productive resource* within organizations. More specifically, the paper explores how disability informs and affects management practices. In order to accomplish this aim, three in-depth interviews with disabled managers in three different Swedish companies have been conducted. The findings show that the lived experiences of disability impregnate management practices in many various ways, leading to: Creativity, innovation and problem-solving skills; Diversity promotion; Positive energy, humbleness and a holistic view on employees; Focus on well-being in the workplace, and Increased delegation skills and establishment of an empowering culture.

Keywords: phenomenology; management; qualitative research; management practice

Introduction

In Sweden, there are approximately one million people who are categorized as physically or mentally disabled (www.scb.se). Being categorized as disabled often implies being excluded from the labour market, as there are only four out of 10 employable disabled people who have an employment. The situation is not much different in the UK where there are six million people (ca 18% of the working age population) with some form of work limiting disability (Stevens 2002). In Europe as a whole, the employment rate of disabled people is 27% (Stevens 2002).

The fundamental ethical aspect of this is that a good society should be one that recognizes diversity (Durkheim 1971). Today, disabled people are seeking to assume relevant responsibilities on a par with non-disabled citizens, and meaningful paid work is key for empowering people with impairments and enabling them to assume increased responsibility for their own welfare. During the last few decades, a formalized interest in helping the disabled to participate more fully in society has developed by the establishment of government-sponsored activities for integrating the disabled on the labour market (e.g. the International Labour Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization).

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However, there is still much to do in order to achieve full integration at all professional levels, and according to Barnes and Mercer (2005), the small proportion of disabled people, which is employed in paid work, is rarely to be found in professional and management occupations. Rather, they are mostly to be found in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations, routine clerical and personal service work, and they are overrepresented in the rising numbers of people working from home.

In general, in organizational research, disability is still mostly treated as a hindrance for performance (Hughes 1999), and one of the barriers to the employment of disabled people is the perceived extra costs related to adaptation of the physical work environment and reduced efficiency (Grover and Piggott 2005). Within the diversity research stream, disability has to a large extent been neglected (Woodhams and Danieli 2000) and according to Thanem (2008, 584) there is 'an inherent ableism of diversity management wherein the able body is privileged and preferred while the disabled body is deemed too different and too problematic to be included'.

On the whole there are two main approaches to disability – the medical, or biological, model and the social model. On the one hand, the medical model to disability defines disabled people in terms of biological properties (Stone and Colella 1996; Colella 2001). It is on this model that WHO draws its definition of disability, stating that the aim is to make disabled people more 'normal'. The social model, on the other hand, defines disability as a social creation (Oliver 1990, 1996; Barnes 1991; Oliver and Barnes 1998), not a set of physical dysfunctions. However, both these models tend to be simplistic. For example, Shakespeare and Watson (2002) bemoan that the social model tends to see the world in 'black and white'. Similarly, Brisenden (1986, 20) stated that 'in order to understand disability as an experience, as a lived thing, we need much more than the medical "facts" . . .'

This paper argues for a view on disability as a productive resource within organizations. More specifically, the paper explores how disability informs and affects management practices. This is urgently needed in organizational research, since 'there is an almost total absence of literature which suggests that disabled people may be uniformly or disproportionately skilled in any particular areas' (Woodhams and Danieli 2000, 412). In this paper, practices are defined as the skills, embodied arrays or tacit knowledge and presuppositions that underpin activities (e.g. Bourdieu 1990; Taylor 1995; Schatzki 2001).

In order to explore this aim, three managers with various bodily specificities and disabilities representing three different Swedish companies have been interviewed. The few interviewees mirror the difficulties encountered finding disabled individuals in management positions.

To overcome the dualistic and, as researchers have argued, problematic approaches to disability inherent in both the medical and the social model, the paper departs from a phenomenological view on disability. From this perspective, different bodily experiences of the world encourage different ways of thinking, other capabilities and different perspectives, since perceptual experience acquires content thanks to our possession of various bodily skills. Thus, the present paper suggests an embodied approach to management practices that focuses on bodily specificities as a productive source of economic value creation within organizations.

The contribution of this paper is twofold. First, it provides a first remedy to the ignorance of the role of the body in management practice, showing how the body as lived, not only as categorization, actively contributes to management practices.

Second, I show how organizations can be enriched through the employment of individuals with diverse bodily specificities, and that diversity and disability as bodily specificities are productive sources of organizational value-creation and provide new perspectives, priorities and decisions that all have in common a focus on employees as holistic individuals rather than simply labour.

Disability and organizations

It is not the intent of this paper to provide a profound review on the literature on disability from the medical versus the social model. However, a short summary of how these perspectives have impregnated organizational research is in order, before moving on to the theoretical perspective embraced in this paper.

In extant organization research, disability has been studied from various perspectives: in relation to diversity management (Woodhams and Danieli 2000); how disabled people are treated in organizations (Stone and Colella 1996) and the barriers that discriminate against disabled people in organizational life (Barnes and Mercer 2005; Foster 2007). Also, the majority of research dealing with disability has been done by US scholars problematizing the treatment and role of disabled people in organizational life. This body of research is mostly pursued from a medical approach (c.f. McFarlin, Song, and Sonntag 1991; Jones 1997; Stone and Colella 1996; Colella 2001). The approach to disability taken in the medical model implies that disability is viewed as biological, caused genetically or by external environmental incidents such as illness, accidents, war and pollution. Its main concern is to detect, avoid, eliminate and categorize disability, and to help and rehabilitate disabled people through medical and psychological treatments. The medical model has to some extent fostered a stigma view on disability, and tends to foster existing prejudices in the minds of employers. Because the condition is seen as 'medical', a disabled person will be prone to, for example, bad health and sick leave, and is sought to be less productive than a person without disability.

In contrast to the literature departing from the medical model, deriving mainly from the United States, writers from a largely UK background have adopted the social model of disability to launch a fundamental critique of the medical model (Oliver 1990, 1996; Oliver and Barnes 1998; Foster 2007; Barnes and Mercer 2005).

The social model defines disability as social oppression caused by social and material barriers in the environment rather than the form of impairment. Thus, this model assumes that disability can be resolved by removing barriers in the social and material environment. Therefore, research that takes the social model as a point of departure is mainly concerned with how people are disabled and discriminated against by factors in the social and material environment, from social structures that keep disabled people out of work (Abberley 2002) to physical barriers in environments that inhibit the mobility of disabled people (Gleeson 1999). While this research highlights the social and material barriers which discriminate and exclude disabled people in organizational life, it has not made us understand deeper the contributions of disabled people in organizations and how they could be considered as providing value to organizations. The very focus of these studies on adjustment of the environment risk to undermine a view on disabled employees as resources and instead tend to emphasize disabled employees as 'a problem to be solved' or passive victims (Allen, Milner, and Price, 2002; Imrie 2004), which also fosters a negative view on disabled employees due to the costs incurred when

employing a person with disability. The social model also completely ignores the lived experiences of disabled people and the bodily aspects of disability, and instead assumes that problems of disability are entirely socially constructed (Hughes and Paterson 1997).

In contrast to the social and medical model, scholars working from an embodied approach emphasize the bodily differences of disabilities and impairments, which are important since not only do different people experience different disabilities differently, but people may experience what is often seen as 'the same' disability differently (Imrie 2004), and that experiences, problems and needs may vary between individuals and across gender, age and other intersectionalities.

Research pursued from this approach is therefore concerned with what the medical model and the social model tend to miss. The focus on people's lived and embodied experiences of disabilities may also challenge static categorizations of disability and problematize and add to our understanding of what disability and impairment means for real people. More specifically, Thanem (2008) suggests that this approach may enable us to shed light on disabled peoples' lived experiences in organizational life, for example, how feelings of pain and fatigue affect the ability of disabled employees to attend meetings, workshops and working lunches. In the following section, I elaborate on how the phenomenological view can add to organization studies and studies on disability.

The lived body as a productive resource

The body is still not theorized and is hardly seen as being relevant to the development of knowledge about organization (Dale 2001; Dale and Burrell 2008; Hindmarsh and Pilnick 2007; Casey 2000). However, within sociology, the conception of social life as dematerialized and disembodied has not gone unnoticed and unchallenged (e.g. Turner 1996; Trethewey 1999). During the last decades, influenced by Foucault (1979), Bourdieu (1990) and Goffman (1959), some researchers have taken an interest in the human body. However, most such research has treated the body as an object of discursive construction and disciplinary control (e.g. Burrell 1984; Acker 1990; Bordo 1993; Cregan 2006; Turner 1996; Balsamo 1996; Trethewey 1999). Recently, scholars have started to drift away from considering the body as being passive and discursively constructed, and instead have started to explore embodiment as active in shaping action (e.g. Shilling 2005; Hassard, Holliday, and Willmott 2000; Dale 2001; Hindmarsh and Pilnick 2007; Thanem 2008; Heaphy and Dutton 2008; Dale and Burrell 2008).

This paper takes a similar point of departure.

Whereas within extant research a disabled body is understood in terms of 'restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in a normal manner' (Thomas 2004, 575), in other words, 'normal' minus some capacity or some feature, the present research suggests a view of the body in terms of what it does and performs, and highlights the body's potential to 'know' and 'act' in ways that go beyond norms and discourses (Bourdieu 1977; Dreyfus 1996; Merleau-Ponty 1962,1965, 1968; Wacquant 2005) and how this in turn affects management practices.

It is suggested that the body as a subject ('body-subject', as Merleau-Ponty (1962) calls it), is the locus of meaningful action and learning and that it is through our bodily senses that we gain access to the world (Merleau-Ponty 1962). On this count, body and mind form a body-mind complex whereby the mind is given a body and the

body is given a mind. The link between this body-mind complex and the practical world is not social rules or categories, but spontaneous engagement with the world, through 'doing' things, 'acting' and direct experience. No matter the shape, colour or specificity of our body, our being in the world means that we do things, in different ways. To the extent that being-in-the-world involves a lived body engaged in situated everyday practices, humans are defined in terms of the things they do in their life-world. However, what they do does not involve unmediated, bodily activities; rather these activities are mediated through perception, where perception is not viewed as passive receptivity, but rather as a creative and skilful capacity that shapes in specific ways the activities and practices that it accompanies. Such perceptual, bodily activities are referred to by Merleau-Ponty (1962) as embodiments. To the extent that what the body perceives and receives (perceptual receptivity) is only possible thanks to its accumulated preceding movements and embodiments Merleau-Ponty maintains that: 'One could also say that the behaviour is the first cause of all stimulations...[and that] it is the organism itself...which chooses the stimuli in the physical world to which it is sensitive' (1962, 441). 'What we see and perceive is thus reflected in the shape of the physical capacities of our body, in the sense that our body conditions what it perceives and does, but it is also conditioned by what is seen and done, for seeing presupposes being seen' (Merleau-Ponty 1962).

Husserl (Husserl 2001, 42) and Merleau-Ponty refer to the perceptive possibilities that are inherent in this object-subject interaction as 'horizons'. Horizons are dynamic frameworks of possibilities that constitute our sense of things in the world. In any experience, only certain possibilities are offered up and only some of these appear especially salient. That perception is dependent upon this interaction between bodily features and the objects around us also implies that depending on a subject's bodily possibilities, perception varies and hence, also priorities, actions and decision-making. This explains the reason why it is reasonable to assume that different bodily specificities also may lead to different management practices.

Embodiment presupposes some kind of perception and some way to act in response to what is presented; in this response we are solicited or called to transform the presented situation correlative with our bodily disposition. Merleau-Ponty calls this tendency to respond to situational solicitations 'skilful coping'. In everyday skilful coping, our activities are experienced as a steady flow of skilful activity in response to one's sense of the situation. In our skilful coping, when we sense that our situation deviates from some optimal body-environment relationship, our motion takes us closer to that optimum and thereby reduces the 'tension' resulting from the deviation. In this context, one's body is simply solicited by the situation to get into equilibrium with it. The intentional arc throws new light on how the human agent is led to act, know and learn – merely thanks to the body's tendency to achieve equilibrium. Therefore, it is also very useful in order to understand the relationship between disability and management practice, and how disabled individuals' skilful coping in turn may lead to different actions, priorities and decisions.

The phenomenology approach adopted in this paper provides an alternative to the medical and social view of the body, underlining that rather than the social and discursive shaping our conceptions of what we do and learn, and how we perceive of ourselves, learning occurs through embodiment, at the interstice between sociality, discursivity and our bodies.

Method

Drawing on embodied approaches in management studies and the social sciences (e.g. Dale 2001; Engelsrud 2005; Knights and Thanem 2005), this paper develops an embodied methodology to explore the active role of the body in management work.

Although a conventional qualitative interview method is used, I attempt to tune it towards bodily aspects in order to be able to portray the lived embodiments of disabled managers in fine-grained detail, and to avoid reducing the body to an abstract absent object outside the scientific knowledge production.

As a method of understanding how disability affects management practice the study has relied on semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with three managers in three organizational settings. Altogether, three semi-structured face-to-face interviews have been performed with disabled managers with a focus on issues as leadership style, the influence of disability on work and management, and disability as an advantage/disadvantage. The interviews lasted for about 60–90 minutes each. Each respondent was interviewed face-to-face once, with a follow-up telephone interview for every respondent to clarify certain issues. The small number of respondents is a clear limitation in this study. At the same time, it is unfortunately an indication of the difficulties of finding disabled persons in management positions. Having that said, the findings of this paper are to be considered as tentative and explorative, and further studies are needed in order to confirm them and be able to generalize.

The initial research focus was very broad and did not specifically focus on how disability shapes management practices. Rather, the overall aim was to understand how the body can constitute a resource in organizations. During the interviews, the link between disability and management practice emerge as a recurrent theme. Thus, in line with a phenomenological approach to data collection, the project started with the intent to create a 'life-text' that renders the respondent's experience as a story, which in a second round was interpreted and framed into a more specific finding (Von Eckartsberg 1998). In line with a phenomenological approach, the goal was to understand the respondents' actual experiences as they are actually lived in the daily life (Von Eckartsberg 1998).

As McCracken (1988) suggests, an interview guide was used in order to ensure that all topics of interest were covered, yet allowing enough flexibility to pursue emerging themes based on the respondent's answers. The semi-structured nature of the interviews fostered a conversational style and elicited open, ample and rich responses. As suggested by Creswell (1994) and McCracken (1988), the conversation itself dictated the order in which the various issues were discussed rather than following the guide statically. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed from Swedish into English in order to suit the format for publication.

The interviews have been performed paying specific attention to the bodily dimensions of the interview situation. Engelsrud (2005, 270) underlines that 'the body is both involved in and gains specific significance for qualitative method and for the research interview in particular'. This is because

'what I notice and sense in the relation between myself and the informant can be used to bring out new dimensions of the research topic. The interview is used to explore how the things I register with my body can have something to do with the informant's experience' (Engelsrud 2005, 270).

Both the researcher's and the informant's lived bodies come into play in the interview situation. The dialogue creates emotional energy and both the articulated and the tacit, unarticulated bodily expressions of the informants can constitute relevant empirical material (Engelsrud 2005). Also, unpredictable feelings may direct the dialogue towards unexplored and un-thought-of grounds. During the interviews, we exercised what Munkejord (2009) labels 'methodological emotional reflexivity' in order to be attentive to the emotional states of the respondents and ourselves. Brisenden (1986, 20) states that

'we need to build up a picture of what it is like to be a disabled person in a world run by non-disabled people. This involves treating the experiences and opinions of people with disabilities as valid and important; more than this, they must be nurtured and given and overriding importance . . . '.

This is precisely the aim of this paper.

Data analysis

The first phase of the analysis of the empirical data was conducted in parallel with the data generation by continually transcribing the interview transcripts (Eisenhardt 1989; Ezzy 2002). In this manner I was able to follow-up arising themes continually in the following interviews.

The focus at the first stage of analysis was to grasp the whole meaning of the respondents' experience, instead of dividing it into parts and imposing abstract concepts. Also, I aimed to get a sense of the whole before starting the coding. The coding of data departed from an inductive categorization method that included labelling of recurrent factors appearing in the interview transcripts (Strauss and Corbin 1994). The analysis preceded first individually and then across respondents to identify arising themes. In this sense, the coding process can be seen as data driven. However, the coding process was also driven by the theoretical concepts of embodiment and specific attention was paid both to how disability was experienced as a resource influencing management practice. Hence, a combined deductive and inductive method was used. During the data generation and analysis, attention was also directed towards how respondents' emotions were expressed. At certain stages in the interviews, respondents became more enthusiastic and underlined topics by using their tone of voice and body language. Such modes of expressions were also taken into account in the transcripts and the analysis.

In order to verify my interpretation of the data and the fair account of respondents' lived experience, the findings were discussed with the respondents who were offered to comment on the text.

In the following section, the findings are presented in the form of vignettes, which are focused descriptions typical to the empirical data (Miles and Huberman 1994). The choice of presenting the findings in this way is a conscious one, since it enables readers to get a holistic sense of respondents' lived experiences instead of imposing a stricter structure on the findings.

Three vignettes on disability and management practice

In this section I present the three vignettes of the interviewed managers, illustrating how they perceived that their disability informed their management practice. The data are presented selectively, and sections of the interviews that specifically

underlined the connections between embodiment and management practices have been emphasized at the expense of other parts. The names of the respondents have been changed in order to maintain anonymity.

Anna, Head of the Swedish riding police

Anna is 47 years old and has worked as the Head of the Swedish riding police for 10 years. Five years ago she was injured in a car accident and was paralysed from the waist and down. Now, she alters between wheelchair and crutches, and she can manage to walk shorter distances without aid. Anna's story is intriguing since she has experience both from being an able-bodied and disabled manager and thus can compare her management practices before and after she became disabled.

During the interview with Anna, she explained how her disability has influenced her management practices in several ways. First and foremost, she underlined that she has become more aware of the vulnerability of being human, and how fast life can change. These insights have much inspired Anna in her role as manager and in her priorities and decision-making. For example, she says that she has started to pay much more attention to her employees' well-being and health-related issues. In the following quote she underlines the importance that she attributes to physical exercise:

> My leadership has become much more impregnated with health awareness. I am very positive towards all forms of physical activities and recreation and I think it depends on my own experiences and knowledge about how the body works and so on. I have become more aware of the importance of the body.

In similar lines, Anna states that well-being is also about eating well in order to stay focused in this physically demanding work, and she tries to foresee and communicate this awareness among her employees:

> I try to make my employees aware of the importance of eating well and healthy, otherwise they will get tired when riding long hours and they risk to hurt themselves if they lose concentration. Good food is important in order to avoid being hurt.

Thus, based on her experiences Anna makes the connection between healthy eating and the avoidance of accidents. Once again, the vulnerability of the body permeates her management practice in the sense that she aims to establish an awareness of well-being among her employees.

In order to impregnate the organization with this thinking, Anna had furthermore implemented a 'health inspiration team' consisting of two employees that served the purpose of encouraging training, healthy eating and well-being.

Anna's interest for health-related issues had also made her more understanding towards employees that became ill. For example, she explained that one of her employees became severely ill a year ago, followed by many days of sick leave, 'odd' behaviours that interfered with everyday organizational practice, and so on:

> Things that I would have difficulties to accept, understand and relate to if I did not have the personal experience that I have today. Now, I understand how hard life can be, and as a manager I have much more tolerance and understanding for these things. I would say that I have become more empathic and much more human in my management style.

She continued to explain that her management is more inclusive today, and that she tries to create an organization that can cater also to individuals who are disabled or have reduced work capacity:

> An organization is not just a place for healthy individuals, but it must also be prepared to take care of them when they turn ill. This is an area where I feel that many managers fail today and where my experience of being ill myself has made me realize how important it is that the organization supports you in order to be able to rehabilitate and come back.

Another issue that relates to Anna's insights about the vulnerability of human life is her priority of workplace safety. Anna explained that she even manipulates her budget in order to be able to attribute more money to security-related issues such as safety equipment, since this is such a high priority for her:

> I spend much money from my budget on safety equipment, more than I should actually. For example, I have invested in protection sunglasses of high quality instead of the standard ones. Similarly, I am changing our car fleet from [brand 1] to [brand 2] since these cars are considered more secure. I don't want my employees to risk being stuck on the road with a broken car and if involved in an accident I want them to come out of it in the best possible way. I am constantly reminded of what happened to me, and those experiences that I carry with me are reflected in my leadership.

Another example of Anna's workplace security thinking is that she has invested in portable water tanks so that all riding policemen have access to water while on the horse. This was done on her own initiative, and she says that: 'If there is something that can improve the work situation I don't hesitate to invest in it. I try to pay attention to all those small things that can make work life and health better.'

These two examples also show how the acknowledgement of bodily needs, rooted in disability, led to innovation and problem-solving.

Finally, Anna underlines that her own experiences from being paralysed have made her understand the challenges that other disabled persons face in society and organizational life, and that this awareness has made her to adjust the work environment to be as accessible as possible, and she constantly strives for improvements:

> I can easier evaluate the work environment with regard to its accessibility for disabled people, especially those in wheelchair since that is my personal experience. And I can see all those challenges and adaptations that need to be made that others simply do not see. We have changed several things here after I came back. I was shocked how inaccessible it was before. Now we often get compliments for the accessibility.

Anna explained that her interest and understanding for disability has spread also to her employees, and has raised awareness of the importance of accessibility and diversity within her organizations:

> My interest in disability and my holistic view of humans is also transferred to my employees, and they have a better understanding for disabled people and also how quick life can change. This has made it easier for us to integrate physically challenged individuals. Before, this was very problematic because the other employees considered such an individual as someone who contributes less. Now they understand that it is not the case, they just contribute differently.

During the interview, I asked Anna to summarize how her disability had affected her management identity and she explained that she felt as if she had become more empathic in her leadership. Also, she felt that had become better at understanding different people's specific situations and challenges and she is more overt in sharing both joy and difficulties.

Malin 30, Project Manager, Stockholm City Council

Malin has been employed for two years as Project Manager in the department of leisure coordination for disabled youths in Stockholm city. Malin was born with Cerebral Paresis and is a wheel chair user since childhood.

In the interview with Malin, she immediately brought forward the problem-solving and creative skills that she felt that she had developed due to her disability. This was something that Malin felt made her different to her colleagues, who sometimes could be stuck in a traditional, non-innovative thinking, an 'inside-the-box-thinking':

> As a disabled person you must think differently, think new. You become more creative. You must find solutions all the time. You must see possibilities and not problems. If I had focused on the problems I would not have come this far, because there are millions of obstacles in society, but if you focus on solutions you can come a long way. Independently of the work task that I have in front of me, I focus on the solution. I have become trained in that skill. I think that many people without impairment are much more disabled that I am and I often see that with my colleagues. Most of the time it is not about coming up with new innovations, but small things, like when they say 'it is not possible' I don't take that, I push the process and say 'of course it is possible'.

Malin also stated that her colleagues and employees often tell her that she inspires them to think differently and be more oriented towards finding solutions to problems. She also explained that her disability brings in a sort of relativity to the workplace, in the sense that people relate their situation to hers and are less inclined to complain over small everyday issues:

> At all the places I have worked, people told me that they have learnt so much from me and that they have got another perspective on life. Many people tell me that they have learnt that they have nothing to complain about. They see that it can be quite hard for me sometimes and that I never complain. I guess I give them another perspective on things.

Malin also explained that she had managed to create a work-place climate where diversity was considered as something positive and where employees dared to be different:

> There is a large understanding among people, and I feel that we have a better atmosphere at work, and that people dare being themselves to a larger extent here than in many other organizations, because they see that people are different but still very similar in another sense. I can see that at our department, the tolerance towards so to speak "people that are different" is much higher than at other departments. I think this is much due to me being a role model and my management style, which is impregnated with tolerance and acceptance towards people. I have managed to widen the concept of normality and it is fantastic to see how many of the people who work here have changed in only two years.

Maria 32, Manager and founder of a personal assistance company

Maria was born with a spinal disorder and she has always been using a wheelchair.

Similar to Malin, Maria very soon in the interview also started to talk about her creativity and problem-solving orientation that impregnates her management. Maria claims that a disabled person is used to resistance and to being questioned all the time, which for her had implied that she has developed innovative, creative and problem-solving skills. During the interview, she explained that: 'Disabled people can see life differently. To feel different and to feel excluded make you stronger, you must strengthen your own driving forces and never let anything stop you. You get the mentality that all challenges can be overcome.'

Furthermore, Maria states that being a manager with disability has implied being more scrutinized from colleagues:

> As a disabled person, when you get a job, you know that your colleagues will keep an extra eye on you, they check if you manage to do your work properly. Therefore, you are extremely keen on making a good job, be in time and so on. Since it is still today so difficult for a disabled person to get an employment, you have a very strong commitment to work when you get one. This attitude also influences my way of being a manager. I am very keen on making a good job. Ambitious, sometimes too ambitious.

Maria claimed that this scrutiny often makes her, and other disabled people that she knows, feel a constant pressure to show good work results and being what she refers to as 'the perfect manager'.

Maria also underlines that her disability considerably has affected her view on life. She mentioned several times during the interview that her disability has made her more humble towards life. In her role as manager, he explained that this was expressed in a variety of ways. Most and foremost, she feels that she is considering her employees as holistic persons (rather than only as employees or labour) and that she encourages the expression of feelings in the organization:

> To me, being a human being is to accept and show your feelings. I think that to be a successful leader you must accept your feelings and use them, not repress them. I think that the most important thing is to show your own vulnerability. That is where the glow is, where the power is, where there are crying and screaming, laughter and love. I try to accept the whole spectra of being human in my leadership. I want my employees to show feelings. It is ok to be sad. It is ok to be happy. I don't want zombies. I have established this in my leadership through implementing an allowing corporate culture. We dare to talk about the hard things. And I talk much about my feelings, my fears. I am also very keen on showing appreciation for my employees. I give them presents for Christmas, Easter, Valentine, their birthday etc. It is all about emotions, of making people feel appreciated and seen.

Maria also states that her disability has made her very good at delegating tasks. This is simply because her disability hinders her to do certain tasks. Related to this, she also explains that she has no problem with asking for advice and help from her colleagues: 'Another strength is that I dare to ask for help in my leadership. I don't have the feeling that I have to know everything and I have no problems with delegating tasks.'

Maria's disability affects her physically in the sense that she sometimes feels very tired and some days she must rest and cannot work. Therefore, for Maria it is imperative to have flexible work hours and a flexible work structure. According to

Maria, this is something that gives all employees, disabled or not, an opportunity to better manage the tension between work and leisure and she has foreseen to establish a large flexibility regarding when and where to work and employees have a large influence on their own schedule.

Finally, Maria's disability has been a great advantage in the creation of her company and in creating its competitive advantage. In order to understand the customers' needs (disabled persons in need of personal assistance in their home), it is important to be able to relate to their context and life situation. Maria explains that her personal experience of being disabled also has helped her to understand the needs and wants of other disabled people and therefore the company has been one of the most successful personal assistance companies in Sweden. Thus, in this case, Maria's disability has led to a competitive advantage for the company. Maria attributes this success largely to her competence of being able to understand the customers' needs and hiring the right employees:

> My customers and I 'speak the same language', we use the same terms and so on. I can interpret what they really mean when they say something. What lies behind. They often have difficulties in articulating their needs, but since I understand the context and can read between the lines I am able to provide them with the right assistance.

With regard to recruitment, she explains that she hires her employees not only based on their competence on paper, but also based on their empathic abilities and their personal experiences. It is always a bonus if a future employee has a personal experience from disability, for example, in the family or in their social network.

Disability and management practices

The interviews clearly show the influence of lived bodily experiences on management practices. Several links between the interviewees' experiences of being disabled and their management practices can be identified. Some of the themes are generic across the cases as outcomes from the experiences of being disabled in a society privileging able-bodied employees and managers, and others may be more closely related to the specific disability of the respondent. What these stories have in common is that they illustrate how the role of the body is manifested and expressed in management practices and how managers perceive of themselves, their priorities and agendas. For the respondents, being wheelchair users, experiencing the physical pain of becoming disabled, experiencing able-bodied people's scrutiny and categorization, and the challenges posed by social and organizational everyday life all impregnated their leadership in various ways. The findings show the importance of bringing back the body into theory (Buchholz 2006) and especially organization studies, where individuals are 'implicitly or explicitly treated as a disembodied consciousness' (Dale 2001, 204).

Inspired by Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Wacquant (2005), the paper is able to shed light on how management practice is not solely stemming from cognitive reflection, as a purely intellectual, mind-bounded activity, but rather as an activity that is closely linked to embodied experiences and where those experiences are resources that managers pre-reflectively draw upon. In the following, the five themes that emerged as prevalent in the respondents' management practices are presented.

Creativity, innovation and problem-solving skills

The first theme that emerged was how being disabled and constantly encountering challenges in everyday life in society led to the development of creativity, innovation and problem-solving skills. These lived experiences affected the way in which the managers looked upon challenges in their organizational setting and it seemed to foster a more innovative and open mindset. It appears as if the mindset that impregnated the respondents' management practices was that all problems can be solved, and if there is no solution readily at hand, the manager and the employees will work together in order to find a solution.

In one case, this innovative mindset was manifested in the way in which the manager handled workplace security and how her disability fostered new innovations in regard to how workplace security could be improved. Thus, certain types of innovation could be seen as being rooted in bodily experience and in disability more specifically.

Diversity promotion

The respondents also felt that being a disabled manager enabled a broadening of the normality concept in the organization, which had several positive consequences. First, the disabled manager acts as a role model who enables to extend the normality concept in the organization and fosters a more allowing and open organizational culture where the subjects can express a broader range of identities. An extension of the professional behavioural norm made employees feeling less restricted to conform to narrow definitions of identity and being within the organization, which often are imposed by managers (Alvesson and Willmott 2002). On the contrary, the managers attempted to eliminate such strict definitions of professional identity, and therefore reduce employees' focus on managing their professional identities, leaving more space for employees to express their personalities freely. Thus, in summary, the managers seemed to be very aware of inclusiveness in their management practice, an awareness that stemmed from their own lived experiences of marginalization and being different.

Positive energy, humbleness and a holistic view on employees

The third theme that emerged was how the disabled management practices were impregnated with positive energy, humbleness and a holistic view on employees. First, by having a disabled manager, able-bodied employees become aware of the challenges related to disability, in society and in the workplace. One of the respondents felt that this made her employees more positive as they tend to feel less inclined to complain and instead think more positively and feel gratitude and humbleness for life.

The managers explained that their disability had several existential implications such as an attitude of humbleness and gratitude towards life. In their management practice this was expressed by a view on employees as holistic individuals, not only as labour. This implied that showing emotions, sadness, happiness and sharing both difficult and successful experiences was an important part of the organizational culture that was fostered by the management. In a similar vein, one of the managers also claimed that she, when recruiting employees, took into consideration the lived

experiences of the employees in addition to formal work and education experience. To her, embodied experiences such as having encountered disability personally or through relatives or friends, were just as important. In this case, since the company worked with personal assistance, the emphatic capacity was considered imperative in order to relate to and understand the context of disabled individuals.

Focus on well-being in the workplace

Related to how disability fosters a holistic view on employees, the empirical material also shows that well-being was a high priority issue for the respondents. The increased awareness of the body, its vulnerability and the importance to care for it impregnated their management practices. This was expressed by encouraging training on work hours, eating healthy food, foreseeing that ergonomic needs were met and that the workplace was accessible, and that employees felt good not only mentally but also physically. Even though the focus on well-being is an increasing trend in society and organizations, it appeared as if these managers were specifically aware of the links between physical health and work performance. This is not surprising, since their disability have made them more aware of their bodies and how their personal bodily well-being affects their work. Thus, their lived experience as disabled made them prioritize well-being, possibly to a larger extent than most able-bodied managers. Grant, Christianson, and Price (2007, 51) further claim that 'although managerial practices are often structured with the explicit goal of improving performance by increasing employee well-being, these practices frequently create tradeoffs between different dimensions of employee well-being, whereby one aspect of employee well-being improves but another aspect of employee well-being decreases.'

On the contrary, disabled managers seemed to be able to maintain a holistic view on well-being, focusing both on the physical and the emotional/mental part.

Increased delegation skills and establishment of an empowering culture

The most negative and hard-to-cope-with outcome from being a disabled manager seemed to be the constant pressure stemming from being increasingly scrutinized from colleagues (compared to an able-bodied person). This may, in worst case, lead to increased job-related stress since it may create a striving to live up to an unattainable image of being the ideal manager, and could be a potential barrier for disabled individuals in managerial positions. However, the respondents argued that their disability made it easier and more natural to delegate tasks to their employees, which is an effective way to avoid job-related stress and at the same time empower employees. Since the managers' disability also put certain physical constraints on when, how and the number of hours they could work, not always conforming to the traditional 9–5 work schedule, one of the managers had implemented flexible work hours for all employees, which made them more flexible and enabled them to be in more control over their schedule. This initiative was based on her own embodied experiences of how she could experience bodily fatigue versus energy at times that did not at all fit the 9–5 hours.

Conclusions

Traditionally, research on management and management practice has been surprisingly disembodied (Dale 2001, 8; Dale and Burrell 2008) and management practices, organization strategy and decision-making have largely been studied as cognitive, explicit and 'rational', planned practices. However, this paper shows how these assumptions may be problematic at the least, and misleading at the worst, and that organization behaviour needs to be studied taking into consideration embodiment and how it orients and orchestrates organizational incumbents and organizational action. Here, through the lens of disability, it is illustrated that management practices are closely linked to embodiment and emerge from bodily orientation in the world. More specifically, the paper sheds light on how the lived experiences of disability impregnate management practice in many various ways, leading to: Creativity, innovation and problem-solving skills; Diversity promotion; Positive energy, humbleness and a holistic view on employees; Focus on well-being in the workplace, and increased delegation skills and establishment of an empowering culture.

Second, the study also makes an important contribution to the literature on disability from an embodied approach (Thanem 2008), and illustrates that disability needs to be understood not only as disabling bodily features (in accordance with the medical model) or an environment that makes certain individuals disabled (the social model), but also as how individuals experience their disability in everyday life and how it can be both a hindrance but also a resource depending on the context. In the cases of this paper, managers were able to re-define their disabilities in terms of a resource that enabled them to perform management practices that implied a holistic view on employees with an emphasis on well-being.

This study raises important issues pertinent to the question of the relationship between embodiment and management practice in general, and disability and management in particular. This is not, of course, the last word on these issues. Rather the paper is of a tentative and exploratory nature, and given that it is based on vignettes derived from only three respondents' experiences of their disability there is a need to corroborate the findings with additional studies. In order to create a deeper understanding for the role of disability in management, two interesting trajectories for further inquiry are employees' perceptions of disabled managers, and to explore the role of disability in innovation and creativity.

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